

Early season disturbances in the South China Sea, as discussed by Ramage (1971), may develop as a result of active monsoon troughs which extend eastward across Southeast Asia into the South China Sea (SCS). During late May, increased convergence in the enhanced southwest monsoon flow produced a significant increase in convection across the SCS, and several weak surface circulations were noted along the monsoon trough between Hainan Island and northern Luzon. Surface/gradient level synoptic analysis at 170000Z confirmed the existence of an elongated pressure trough with several 1005 mb centers. The main circulation, located northeast of the Paracel Islands, was actually north of the main convective area which covered most of the SCS south of the trough. Characteristics of SCS monsoon depressions include: strong enhanced southwesterly flow with light winds near the depression center; large areas of convection associated with convergence in the southwesterly flow with little curvature in towards the center; a relatively flat surface pressure regime of large areal extent; and, a mid-tropospheric cyclonic circulation over the area (Ramage, 1971). These conditions were observed in this area.

Initially, TD 05 drifted southwestward east of the Paracel Islands. By 200000Z a slow, eastward-tracking 500 mb short-wave over central China caused TD 05 to accelerate northeastward. As TD 05 accelerated, increased cyclonic shear at the surface southeast of Taiwan caused the system to transition from a monsoon depression to a tropical depression with a small anticyclonic outflow center evident aloft. (Many SCS monsoon depressions never make this transition, usually dissipating after 3-4 days.) Totally divorced from the monsoon trough, TD 05 tracked eastward through the Bashi Channel and then along the remnants of a weak frontal boundary. TD 05 was not forecast to intensify significantly, but it merged with an extratropical frontal boundary near 22.0N 124.8E and produced an improved satellite signature at 230018Z (Fig. 3-05-1) which included a banding-type eye. (Banding-type eyes are usually characteristic of more intense tropical cyclones.) Synoptic analyses during the life of TD 05 never indicated an intensity above 30 kt (15 m/sec). The lowest pressure recorded was 998 mb measured by a ship close to the circulation center. This pressure equates to approximately 32 kt (17 m/sec) (Atkinson and Holliday, 1975).

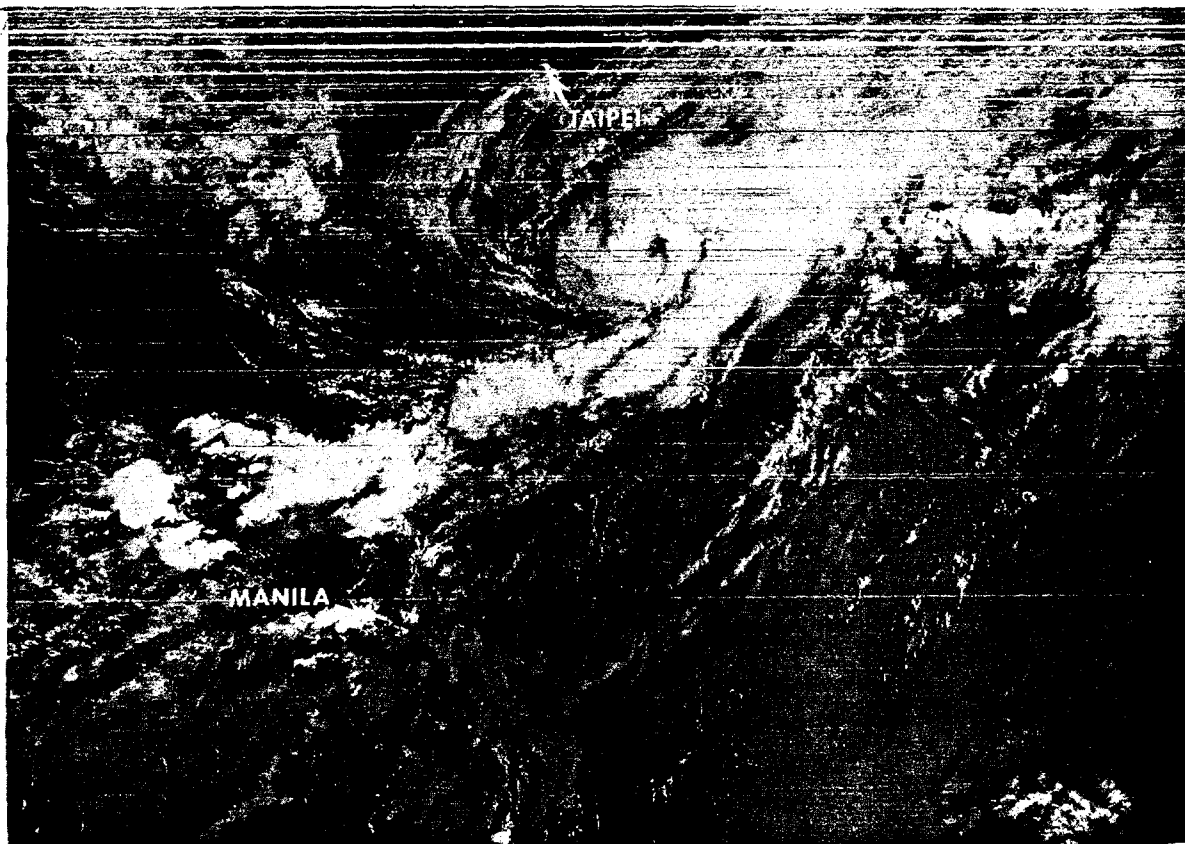


FIGURE 3-05-1. TD 05 at 30 kt (15 m/sec) intensity with banding-type eye moving east-northeastward at 20 kt (37 km/hr), 23 May 1979, 0018Z. (DMSP imagery)